

Dear Chairman McCrory, Chairman Sanchez, Ranking Member Berthel, Ranking Member McCarty, Vice Chairs, and distinguished members of the committee,

My name is Amanda Whitman-Singh and I live in Norwalk Connecticut. I am a parent of three Norwalk Public School Students. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of H.B. 5283.

I am testifying in support of this bill because we need to ensure that every student has access to the resources needed to support their specific learning needs in order to thrive in the classroom and beyond. Norwalk has approximately 12,000 students -- 74% of whom identify as students of color and 68% of whom are identified as high needs. Norwalk allocates \$19,770 per pupil spending.

For comparison, our neighboring towns, such as Wilton and Darien, allocate over \$22,000 per pupil spending despite having a much lower ratio of students identified as high needs (roughly 20%),

These figures show the disproportionality between the number of students in need, and the dollars the students receive depending on the school system (and more specifically their zip code).

In addition to the disadvantages Norwalk students are already facing, the town is set to lose its Alliance District status. This means that while our school district is performing better than before, and has outperformed the metrics of the program, this results in a gradual decrease of funds received annually. Year after year, our students have been improving and our community, teachers, and administrators have increased our ability to meet each student's individual needs and give them the resources to prosper. The loss of this funding only puts that progress in greater jeopardy.

The COVID-19 pandemic even further highlighted the funding gap. A recent Norwalk survey done in 2021, showed that almost half (46.2%) of our high school students reported experiencing depression or symptoms of depression, which is 15% percent higher than the 2019 statewide high school rate, identified by the CT Youth Risky Behavior Survey. With the upcoming loss of ESSER funds, we could see a further reduction in critical mental health support staff when they will be needed the most to curb the impending mental health crisis, especially among our youth. Norwalk and our State can only bridge this financial gap with the influx of additional funds.

I am grateful that this bill recognizes the need to create a more equitable Connecticut, both racially and socio-economically, and will take steps to bring us closer to that reality. Though this bill alone will not completely close the racial funding gap, it does put our state on the right path by beginning the conversation. Thank you for your time today and I urge you to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Amanda Whitman-Singh  
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